

Determining Importance: Teaching Strategy

Introduction:

- To introduce the concept of **Determining Importance**, have students imagine that they have been given the opportunity of spending one year alone on a deserted island. If they survive this year, they will win \$10 million. They are allowed to bring just 15 items with them to the island. What will they bring? Have students list their items on a piece of paper, along with reasons for each choice. Then, invite students to share their list with a partner, making changes if their partner persuades them of the importance of different items. If students could only bring ten items, which would they delete from their list? What if they could only bring five? Debrief students' lists in a class discussion. Are all the lists the same? Why or why not? Are all the items on the lists important? (adapted from Adrienne Gear, *Nonfiction Reading Power*, 2009).
- The decision-making process students used to determine which items to bring to the island is similar to a non-fiction reading strategy called **Determining Importance**. Use the **Determining Importance Student Handout** (p. 4) to introduce this strategy to students.

Modelling:

- Choose one article from this issue to use to model how to use visualizing to determine importance. Read this story all the way through to students. Then, reread it, this time pausing after each paragraph or section. Think out loud about what you see in your head as you read the paragraph. Then, record this image on an overhead, chart paper, or the board. Label your sketch with key words.
- Add on to your existing sketch or create a new one for each of the remaining paragraphs/sections. When you are finished, retell the key details of the story in your own words, using your sketches as a guide. Record this summary of important information beneath your sketches. Discuss: Does the summary include all of the important information? Does the summary include any details that might be interesting but that are not important?

Guided Practice:

- Distribute a copy of the **Visualizing to Determine Importance** organizer (p. 5) to each student. Choose a second article. Read this story all the way through, then reread it, pausing after each paragraph or section so that students can draw and label what they visualize in the box.
- Have students retell the key points of the article to a partner, using their sketches as a guide. Then, ask pairs to work together to write a summary of important information. Remind students that *a summary is a shorter version of a longer piece of writing*. Their summary should not be longer than the lines provided at the bottom of the organizer. Invite students to share their summaries with the class.

Independent Practice:

- Distribute a copy of a third article to students, along with another copy of the organizer. Ask students to read the article to themselves, sketching the important information in each paragraph or section. Then, have students write a summary of the key points of the article beneath their sketches. **A good summary includes all important information while leaving out extra details, is well-organized, and is free from mechanical errors.**

Literacy Focus

Determining Importance Student Handout

Good readers of non-fiction sift and sort information in their heads while they read. They make decisions about what information they need to remember and what information they can disregard.

To determine
importance,
remember that:

... the **first and last
lines** of a paragraph
often contain important
information.

... **text features,
illustrations,
photographs, graphics,
and cue words** offer
many clues as to what
may be important.

... there are often **several
important ideas** in
a piece of text rather
than one main idea.

Visualizing can help you to
determine what is important.
Details can be harder to see in
your mind, so visualizing helps
readers focus on the key points.

